

Recovering Forest and Wildlife Habitat After Hurricane Katrina

by Jimmy Mordica

There is some good news for forest landowners and tree farmers in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. Sixty-two percent of the forest lands damaged belong to private landowners who are finding many recovery options are available, along with funding opportunities.

One shining example is the tree farm operation of Jimmy and Candy Voss of Purvis, Mississippi.



Jimmy Voss was born and raised on the family farm and now owns 125 acres of this farm. Over the years, Jimmy and his family have planted approximately 80 acres in slash pine. The stands of pine range from nine years to twenty years in age.

Then along came Katrina.

As you can imagine, many landowners in south Mississippi suffered great losses. "Now what?" was the question many landowners were asking, and the Voss family came up with an answer.

I first visited with the Voss family at a demonstration field day hosted by Gyro Trac and the Vosses on their tree farm. It did not take long to see that the strength of their family runs deep. The whole family was involved in this field day. Daughters Megan, Courtney, and Casey handled registration, parking, and icing down bottles of water.

I visited with Meagan, the oldest of the three, and she told me the story of how she and her sisters helped hand planting seedlings in the nine-year-old plantation. Isn't it interesting how the ties to the land can bring a family together?

The theme of the field day was to show other landowners how Gyro Trac equipment can clean up debris and damage caused by Hurricane Katrina. Mr. Voss had attended one of the Gyro Trac field days hosted by the RC&Ds at Little Black Creek Water Park and was impressed by what he saw.

Mr. Voss had salvaged as much as possible from the twenty-year-old plantation; the remaining debris was mulched by the Gyro Trac equipment, creating a clean stand with no underbrush or debris. This treatment option reduced the fire hazard and allowed more sunlight on the forest floor, and the mulched

Candy and Jimmy Voss on their tree farm.

debris will decompose and go back to the soil as organic matter. The remaining trees will have more space and less competition. Adding the organic matter will improve soil structure. Removing the debris and competing vegetation will encourage native vegetation that will be beneficial to many species of wildlife and songbirds. These improvements should result in rapid diameter growth. The newly mulched forest floor could also be seeded in commercial grasses.

The objective for the nine-year-old plantation was different. Mr. Voss decided to pre-commercial thin every fifth row and take out broken trees and trees leaning into other rows of trees. This pre-commercial thinning will leave approximately three hundred to four hundred viable trees per acre. The benefits cited for the older plantation will be the same for this one, and result in rapid diameter growth. Also, newly created openings can be over-seeded with grass or other food plot seeds. This can be accomplished with a tractor and seeder or a four-wheeler with a seeder attachment, and will improve overall wildlife habitat.

For more information about Gyro Trac, contact Bryan Davis at 843-879-0208 or visit their web site at www.gyrotrac.net. For a list of vendors that have

(right) Among other practices, the Vosses plan to remove broken and leaning trees .

(below) A Gyro Trac demonstration of mulching debris left by Hurricane Katrina not only enriches the soil by returning organic material, but also reduces fire hazard.



mulching equipment and will perform this work, contact Jimmy Mordica with the Mississippi Forestry Commission at:

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For additional services and funding opportunities, visit or call the following:

Farm Service Agency
<http://www.fsa.usda.gov/ms>
(601) 965-4300

Natural Resource Conservation Service
<http://www.ms.nrcs.usda.gov>
(601) 965-5205



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Pine Bark Beetles

Another impact of Hurricane Katrina that was not as obvious as the wind and water damage is the potential for damage from forest pests. The biggest threat is from the group of pine bark beetles, which include the black turpentine beetles, the *Ips* engraver beetles, and the dreaded southern pine beetle (SPB). The *Ips* beetles are causing most of the damage being seen now. They specialize in attacking damaged and drought-stressed trees, killing individual or small groups of trees or a few limbs on a tree.

Southern pine beetles will kill hundreds, and at times thousands, of acres of timber. They occur in cycles, with the last major outbreak in Mississippi being in 1995-96. Last year twelve SPB spots were detected. This year only two spots have been detected so far, but additional detection flights will be made. There is a potential for SPB problems and



Hurricane Katrina damaged and stressed trees, leaving them vulnerable to attack by pine bark beetles.

landowners should keep a close watch on their timber, but at the moment populations do not seem to be building up. Additional information can be obtained from local Forestry Commission offices.

News from Around the State



Waynesboro Nursery

Waynesboro Nursery received a NOAA Honored Institution Award for twenty five years of recording weather for the National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration.

Northeast District

The NED welcomes some new faces. Prentiss/Tishomingo Technician Andrew Tigner and wife Michelle's son, Luke Andrew Tigner, weighed in on July 20 at eight pounds, 20 ounces.

John Brent Ware II, son of Ok-tibbeha Technician John Ware and wife Joyce, made his appearance on April 12. He weighed in at seven pounds, eight ounces and was 20 inches long.

Northwest District

The NWD hosted a retirement luncheon for Radio Technician Billy Tollison on May 23.

On June 29, the NWD held its Safety Awareness Day at Holmes Community College. District Forester Bobby Edwards recognized twenty five employees with a "Certificate of Longevity of Service" as well as hardhats to individuals who had no reportable accidents in the past three years.

South Central District

DF Jack White is now a Grandpa! His granddaughter, Elizabeth Reese Collier, weighed seven pounds, two ounces and is the center of attention at home in Tupelo.

FY06 Statewide Retirements

NED	Mary Joyce Cobb Timothy Harrell Becky Hodges Bobby Jourdan Jimmy McMillen Johnny McMillen Hal Overstreet Edward Pou Stanley Stephens
NWD	Billy Tollison
SCD	Geraldine Grayson Jackie Sciple Betty Smith
SED	Keith Cooper Andy Fillingame Bobbie Jo Fore Norma Rodgers
SWD	Edward R. Brown David Watts
Winona Nursery	Sally Kenny Walter Williams
State Office	Harold Anderson Darlene Slater

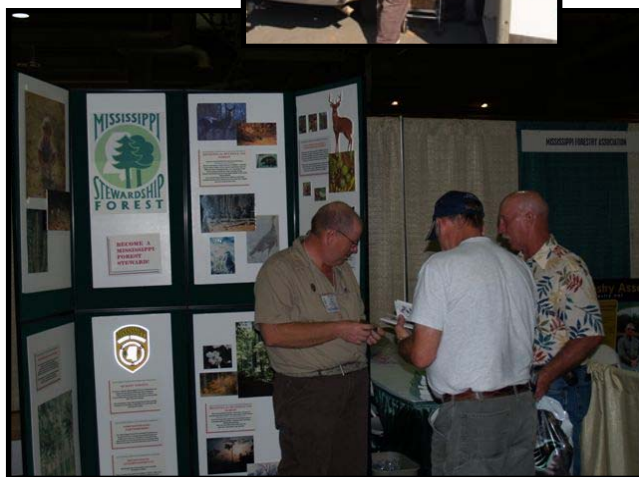
August 2006 Events

There were many events in August that MFC employees participated in to promote MFC programs and good forestry. The *Mississippi Wildlife Extravaganza* was held at the Trade Mart in Jackson the first weekend of August. Forest Stewardship and Firewise displays were used to provide information to over 40,000 visitors.

Leslie Blackwell and Todd Matthews manned the Firewise display at the *Governors Rebuild Mississippi Expo* on the Coast.

A *Safety Day*, sponsored by Walgreen Drug Stores, was held at Kamper Park in Hattiesburg. Jimmy Mordica was there with fire safety information. Also in Hattiesburg, the *Wildlife Expo* was held the last weekend of August in the Multi-purpose Center.

All of these events can be fun, but they are also a lot of work. Exhibits must be set up and taken down, boxes of materials have to be coordinated and set out for the public, and then remaining materials hauled back after the show is over. Our thanks to all who helped in these events.



August was a busy month around the state for expos and extravaganzas. Many Forestry Commission employees pitched in - from loading supplies (top) to setting up and manning displays - in order to reach the public, dispense information, and make these events successful.

Urban Forestry Grants Available for Katrina-damaged Towns



Cities, towns, and communities impacted by Hurricane Katrina will be eligible for grants to assist in their efforts to replant damaged urban forests. Grants of up to \$50,000 will be administered by the MFC, focusing on urban tree replacement, remediation work, tree inventory and assessment, and information and education projects. At a recent FEMA/MEMA meeting held in Biloxi and attended by Jimmy Mordica and Todd Matthews, Rick Olson presented information to coastal mayors and other city and county officials and handed out grant application packages. The town of McLain in Greene County (at left) was the first to request help, and MFC personnel are performing an urban tree assessment.

Blood Drive a Success

The MFC partnered with United Blood Services in May to sponsor a blood drive held at the MFC's Tupelo office. Between 9:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m., thirty one donors gave blood. Donors from the MFC were joined by folks from Jesco, Nesco, Cottonbolt, Fastenal, the Internal Revenue Service, the Farm Service Agency, Rural Development, and Tombigbee State Park. Items for "door prizes" were donated by Lowes, Cracker Barrel, Tupelo Hardware, Applebee's, Red Lobster, O'Charley's, Vanellies, the Olive Garden, the Elvis Foundation, with a grand prize of a rocking chair donated by Norbord of Guntown. NE Outreach Coordinator Jeff Ware thanks all who participated.